

## Pearl of Great Price

My wife, Bonnie, and I spent the last week at the beach with most of our immediate family. Our third child, Seth, was there, as was our baby, Summer. Our son, Chris, was there with his wife, Peggy, and 4 of our grandchildren: Bella Grace, Fisher, Poppy, and Wren. They're 8, 6, 4, and 2. I'd tell you where we were but I'm forbidden by Seth and Summer from doing so. You see, we've been going to this beach for 34 years and in the past few years a number of other people have discovered it. They want to keep it quiet and uncrowded. So they've taken a page from the movie "Fight Club" and decided that the first rule this beach is you don't talk about this beach. And the second rule of this beach is you don't talk about this beach. Suffice it to say that it's a lovely, uncrowded family beach somewhere off the North Carolina mainland.

Bonnie spends the 51 weeks we are not at the beach preparing games and surprises to make the week at the beach even more special for the grandkids. Last year she introduced them to "Treasure Hunt." She marks out a plot of sand on the beach and while the kids are busy elsewhere she buries little toys and coins. Then she tells the children that there is buried treasure on the beach in that plot of sand. They love it! They dig and search and are so excited when they uncover one of the pieces of treasure. I doubt that anything in the Treasure Hunt is worth more than a buck, but I think, if you approached them before the

game began and offered them \$5.00 each for that piece of beach, they would turn you down.

I suppose all of us, at some point in our lives, have fantasized about buying a piece of land and then discovering oil on it. As a matter of fact, some years ago, one of the major oil companies was doing geological research in King George, where we used to live. They brought large trucks in, laid down seismic sensors throughout the county and then drove the trucks slowly down the county roads. The trucks had mechanisms that pounded the ground, the sensors picked up the noise and the analysts apparently could tell if the underground structures were promising for oil exploration. For awhile, I doubt that there was anyone in King George who wasn't hoping that they would discover that oil was lying right under their yard. I know I did!

In the Gospel lesson, Jesus talks about such buried treasure. He gave the example of a man who found treasure buried in a field, much like our grandchildren or what the people of King George were hoping for. The man kept the discovery to himself, reburying the treasure. He sold everything he had to gather enough money to purchase the field where the treasure lay hidden. Another man found a valuable pearl, a pearl of great price. The price, in fact, was everything he had. But he was willing to pay it to acquire that one pearl.

I suppose we could call the ethics of the first man into question. Was it completely ethical for him to conceal the fact

that the field held a great treasure from the man he was trying to buy the field from? That's really beside the point. Parables were meant to convey one single truth. What Jesus was saying here was that some things are worth giving up everything for. Some things are so valuable that nothing else compares with them. He was, of course, speaking of eternal life, eternal relationship with the Father. And who would argue? What of this life and this earth can compare with life forever with God in heaven? It is worth sacrificing everything for.

We know it is because that's exactly what Jesus did. He sacrificed everything so that we could have that treasure, that pearl of great price. He gave up His throne in heaven; He became one of us; He suffered and gave up His life and endured the pangs of hell for that treasure, that pearl of great price. And He didn't do it so that He could have it – He did it to purchase it for us, for you and me.

We have that great gift, that treasure, that pearl of great price, that thing of ultimate value by faith in the One who purchased it for us with His own life. It is a gift. We sacrificed nothing for it, but its cost was beyond measure.

Rather than rest with that one single truth, though, let's take it to the next step. When the man in Jesus' story bought the field in which the treasure was buried, or when the man sold everything to buy the pearl of great price, what do you think he

did with it. Did the man dig up the treasure, look at it, and rebury it again? Did the owner of the pearl hide it away and never bring it out? How foolish would that be? We can imagine them, rather, showing their friends, so that they could admire the treasure and the pearl. We can hear them telling and re-telling the story of how each acquired their personal treasure.

We have been given a gift that makes the treasures of which Jesus spoke pale in comparison and fade into insignificance. Were we to sell everything we have, it would not be enough to purchase it. Were we all to pool our resources we could not purchase it for even one of us. All Jesus could do it; only Jesus did it. It cost Him the suffering and death of the cross, but He did it. And He gives it to us freely by faith in Him.

Now, the question is, as we asked of the men in the stories: what will we do with it?

Certainly, we will be grateful for it. How else could we react to such a great gift?

And how could we show our gratitude but by living lives that give glory and honor to the One who gave us the gift.

But will we keep it to ourselves? That is the crucial question. Will we re-bury the treasure, put the pearl in a box?

Again, at this beach [which shall remain nameless] there is fishing pier that juts out about 900' into the ocean. As you stand on the shore and look north, it is the single most distinctive manmade feature you see. It can be seen from a distance of miles down the beach on either side. It is obvious. It can't be missed.

However, if you are driving down the coast road, with a row of houses and shops between you and the ocean, you could easily drive right past the entrance to the pier. It is easy to overlook. It blends right into the other buildings around it. You actually have to look for it and you might drive right past it.

So it may be with us and our treasure, this great gift which God has given us through His Son. When we are together like now, in His house with fellow believers, our faith is obvious. We sing of it, we speak of it, we share it with one another. We wear its symbols around our necks, and on our lapels. We sing and speak God's praises and talk freely of it in this place. When we are here it is the single most distinctive thing about us. It is obvious.

But how is it when we are not in this place? Do we blend in with all the other folks, even those who do not know Jesus? Does our faith make us distinctive from others or are we just like everyone else? Do we bury that treasure, box up that pearl of great price?

Or do we display it. Do we share it with those around us? Do we invite them to know about it, so that they, too, might share in it?

One of the wonderful things about our salvation is that, unlike treasure hidden in a field or a pearl of great price, you can give it away over and over again and never lose it. It doesn't weaken or diminish in value.

You have been blessed with a treasure, a pearl of great price. Jesus invites you to show it, to display it, to wear it with pride, by symbol, with words, with life. He gave up everything for you and me to have it. Now He gives us the great privilege of sharing it with others. It is ours; no one can take it away; but we can give it – over and over and over.